

CONFIDENTIAL

30 JUL 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
VIA: Deputy Director for Administration  
25X1A FROM: [REDACTED]  
Chairman, History Advisory Committee  
SUBJECT: Report of the History Advisory Committee  
25X1A REFERENCE: [REDACTED] "CIA History Program"  
(TAB A)

1. Since its appointment in January of this year, the History Advisory Committee has met almost weekly to investigate and discuss the past and present state of the Agency's history program with the objective of determining a proper role and scope for a future history program. We have interviewed officers associated with the program in the past and held meetings with representatives of concerned components. We have benefited from the investigations and advice of an eminent historian, [REDACTED]. Throughout, we have taken a deliberate and open approach to the question of what the Agency needs and should have in the way of a history program.

2. As recorded in our interim status report, we found that the history program which flourished in the 1960s and early 1970s is essentially dormant, if not dead. The two clerical employees remaining from the original staff manage to answer the most pressing requirements for historical data on a catch-as catch-can basis; nothing else is being done either to identify and capture historical documents or to exploit existing material. [REDACTED] dated 8 August 1973, is a model charter which directs the performance of proper historical functions and grants the historical staff access to the records, but it is a dead letter. Indeed, from 1973 onward the historical program progressively declined to its present moribund state.

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3. We found that past efforts to create and maintain historical records proceeded from a general misunderstanding of the value to the Agency of an effective historical program. As a result, the program suffered from peaks and valleys of executive and organizational interest, from competition for space, funds and personnel, from conflicting perceptions of its benefits and costs, and from precipitate and short-term actions. Even during its most productive period, the program yielded results ranging from good to horrid; component support has varied from grudging tolerance to lethal opposition.

4. Yet we find at the beginning of 1980 wide support within the Agency for a program which will provide an accessible record of Agency activity, a teaching resource, a means of more easily and reliably providing data to the Congress and the public, and a way to respond to the requirements of other agencies involved in the maintaining and recording of Government histories. Although there is no strictly legal requirement for the Agency to write histories or even to maintain records purely for the preparation of histories, there is a strongly felt demand from the Congress, from academia, from the Departments of State and Defense, and from the press that the Agency be able to produce authoritative accounts of its activities, particularly those undertaken as part of larger Government programs. We found a keen awareness of this demand among all the component representatives we interviewed, and a desire that the Agency put itself in a better position to respond to external demands and internal requirements consistent with the DCI's responsibilities under the law to protect intelligence sources and methods.

5. This change in perception can be accounted for by the Agency's having been required to "go public" since the mid-70s as a result of new Congressional and Executive Branch oversight requirements. In the course of responding to these demands for accounting of past Agency activities, our managers and employees have had to devote enormous time and effort to not-always-successful attempts to recapture knowledge of facts and events from the past -- not to mention documents. At the same time, with the passing into retirement of the Agency's founding generation, much of a quarter century of institutional memory has faded away and should be recaptured. A new generation of operators, analysts, and managers finds itself reinventing wheels, systems, techniques, and paper-clips simply because lessons of the past have not been recorded and passed on.

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6. [redacted] in his report to the Committee has stated succinctly why the Agency should, and indeed must, embark on a respectable program of historical accounting:

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"An Historical Activity -- I use the term to denote the totality of an historical effort, its personnel, program, and activities -- is not a luxury but rather a legitimate tool that can and should facilitate the Agency's work.

Certain characteristics of the Agency, both structural and procedural, militate against the establishment and performance of an Historical Activity, and they should be clearly recognized and hardly minimized. Among them are the decentralized nature of the Agency's operational framework; the virtual independence of the major components; compartmentation control; the extreme sensitivity of much of the Agency's production; and the understandable reluctance, particularly on the part of the Directorate of Operations, to record actions and events.

Despite these conditions, a competent Historical Activity, if properly supported, directed and managed, can and should contribute to the Agency's missions, roles, and functions.

The Agency should significantly expand its Historical Activity to enable it to serve the Agency and to help it discharge its obligations."

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7. In consideration of our own findings and of  [redacted] advice (a copy of his full report is attached as Tab B), the History Advisory Committee therefore recommends the following:

a. Establish an Office of the CIA Historian as an independent office under the Director of Central Intelligence. The CIA Historian, occupying an upper-level SIS slot, will in effect sit at the Director's left hand (so that he may record history) and enjoy DCI-level access to programs and documents (so that he may determine the requirements of an historical program).

b. Recruit an historian of professional stature to head up the program and oversee its organization and development. The professional officers staffing the office can come from a variety of sources. Most of these people will be professional or practical historians; some few may be officers detailed or contracted to the office to write up historical data for rewriting into professional histories, assembling reference materials and conducting oral histories. These include:

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(1) Professional historians hired permanently, temporarily, or part-time to turn existing data into finished histories.

(2) On-duty Agency personnel who are qualified historians assigned rotationally to the office to complete specific historical projects (possibly as "Historical Fellows" similar to the present DCI Fellows at the Center for the Study of Intelligence).

(3) Annuitants hired to record historical data or write finished histories of programs or components.

c. Transfer the existing three positions and the two incumbent clerks to the new staff. In addition to the slots, clerical personnel, and holdings of the existing historical program, the new office should eventually absorb the Historical Intelligence Collection and its personnel from the Office of Central Reference to assure the continued functioning of that collection and the services it now provides. Likewise, any collection of historical artifacts should, in time, be housed within the new office, and the records of the various "museum committees" of the past should be reviewed to this end.

d. Provide as a deputy to the historian a career operational or analytical intelligence officer selected primarily for his/her knowledge of the Agency, preferably chosen in consultation with the Historian.

e. Provide a seasoned executive officer to help the Historian preserve current documents for historical purposes and provide the practical administrative support required for the exploitation of existing records. Even more important, according to [redacted] is the assignment to our Records Management Program of a full-time, in-house Archivist to help the Historian identify and preserve records of potential historical value which, according to present criteria, will otherwise be destroyed.

f. Revoke the provisions of [redacted] as a charter for the program.

8. Nothing in these recommendations should be considered as binding on the CIA Historian to be hired, except that some initial organizational steps might be taken if the search for a qualified historian from outside is protracted. [redacted]

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has recommended a number of qualified historians as possible candidates, and he is available for further consultation by the Director. To a considerable extent, our recommendations parallel those of [redacted] and they reflect the advice we have had from the many Agency officers consulted. But the CIA Historian to be appointed, in consultation with the Director and the Deputy Directors, should have the key role in how the office is staffed and how it functions.

[redacted]  
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Attachments:  
Tabs A & B

Distribution:

Orig - Addressee  
1 - DDCI  
1 - Executive Registry  
1 - DDA  
7 - Members, History Advisory Committee.  
1 - DDTR  
1 - OTR Registry

This Notice Expires 1 September 1974

ORGANIZATION

8 August 1973

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CIA HISTORY PROGRAM

*W. E. COLBY*  
13 Aug 1973

1. The CIA History Program has two major objectives which are the principal responsibilities of the CIA Historical Staff. One is to compile an accurate, comprehensive record of significant Agency activities. The second is to develop accurate accounts of certain of CIA's past activities in terms suitable for inclusion in Government-wide historical and declassification programs, while protecting intelligence sources and methods.

2. As a corollary to the first objective, the Historical Staff will be responsible for compiling classified and unclassified histories on an Agency-wide basis and continue to offer guidance and review of an orderly completion of component histories in progress. The Historical Staff will also monitor the maintenance of Agency records and archives.

3. To accomplish its objectives, the Historical Staff is granted access to all Agency personnel and records, subject to the approval of the Deputy Director concerned, provided that the Historical Staff may appeal a refusal to the DDCI. Completed histories will be under the control of the Deputy Director concerned, provided that release to the public will be subject to the approval of the Director.

4. Effective 30 June 1973, the Chief, CIA Historical Staff is Walter Elder, vice , retired.

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W. E. COLBY

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15 June 1980

WHY THE AGENCY NEEDS AN EXPANDED HISTORICAL ACTIVITY  
AND HOW TO GET IT: SOME OBSERVATIONS, THOUGHTS,  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General Statements

An historical program or activity is valid and can be justified only if it is useful to the organization that shelters and nourishes it.

So too at CIA. A strong and competent Historical Activity, if revived and supported, will indeed be useful and prove to be valuable.

An Historical Activity -- I use the term to denote the totality of an historical effort, its personnel, program, and activities -- is not a luxury but rather a legitimate tool that can and should facilitate the Agency's work.

An Historical Activity performs a staff function. It serves the Agency's line officers.

Certain characteristics of the Agency, both structural and procedural, militate against the establishment and performance of an Historical Activity, and they should be clearly recognized and hardly minimized. Among them are the decentralized nature of the Agency's operational framework; the virtual independence of the major components; compartmentation control; the extreme sensitivity of much of the Agency's production; and the understandable reluctance, particularly on the part of the Directorate of Operations, to record actions and events.

Despite these conditions, a competent Historical Activity, if properly supported, directed, and managed, can and should contribute to the Agency's missions, roles, and functions.

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Background

25X1A About a decade ago, the Agency sponsored an historical effort of some magnitude. [ ] dated 8 August 1973 and entitled "CIA Historical Program," directed the Historical Activity to fulfill three major functions: 1) maintain a record of the Agency's activities; 2) write histories of past events; and 3) monitor the records to insure the preservation of important documents relating to the history of the Agency. To fulfill these responsibilities, [ ] granted the Historical Activity access to all the records without regard to compartmentation control.

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The missions thus outlined and the permission thus granted established the basis of an adequate and satisfactory historical program that could be successfully executed.

Unfortunately, I suspect, misunderstanding at higher Agency levels of the legitimate historical functions led to a misdirection of the effort and to mismanagement of the historical resources. Lessening interest in and support of, perhaps mounting opposition to, an Historical Activity prompted the Agency to move the Historical Activity organizationally from the Office of the Director, specifically the Office of the Comptroller, to the Directorate of Administration.

As a consequence of these developments, the Historical Activity began to wither away, to decline and erode to virtual atrophy. About 23 persons were engaged in the Historical Activity around 1970; today there are two.

25X1A Although [ ] presumably still remains in effect, the personnel reductions obviously make it impossible for the historians to fulfill the responsibilities outlined  
25X1A in the [ ] program of 1973.

The Present Situation

Two ladies, one a GS-08, the other a GS-06, presently comprise the entire Historical Activity at CIA. Until early this year, they worked under the direction and supervision of an Historian whose time was mainly devoted to writing a long-range and, I have no doubt, scholarly and sound history of the Bay of Pigs.

Since about January 1980, when the Historian was removed from the Historical Activity and reassigned, the two ladies have faithfully endeavored to sustain and to

fulfill a single facet of the historical functions. They are responding, as best they can, and with informal guidance from the former Historian, to requests for historical information. These come for the most part from other governmental agencies, for example, the Departments of State and Defense. A few come from inside the Agency itself. The requests for information number about ten to fifteen per month; responding to them requires identifying, retrieving, and dispatching appropriate records and making certain that these documents are returned to the Agency. In addition, the ladies respond to about ten or fifteen requests per month by answering them over the telephone.

The historical holdings the ladies use to identify sources of information into their work consists of:

1. About 360 "histories" written approximately between 1953 and 1968. These are documented texts, and sometimes the supporting papers are filed with the "history." Some are held in the historical vault, others in the Archives [redacted]. These "histories" appear to be, in reality, historical studies and monographs, sometimes little more than lists of events. They are more or less ambitious in scope, and their individual value as historical sources ranges from poor to excellent. (Not long ago -- a year or so perhaps -- a Congressional committee or sub-committee asked to see one or more histories, and the Agency complied and was subsequently embarrassed; had these works been labeled "preliminary studies" instead of being dignified by the term "histories," they would no doubt have been recognized for what they are, actually reference materials.)

2. Miscellaneous "histories," for the most part unfinished studies, and miscellaneous documentary collections. The Historical Activity obtained them because the authors and collectors offered them out of the goodness of their hearts in order to prevent their destruction.

3. About 35 oral "histories" obtained in the same manner as above. Some of the tapes have been transcribed.

4. The most important: an impressive and excellent card index (36 cubic feet of 5" x 8" cards) referenced and cross-referenced in detail to records that can be retrieved from files in [redacted] and in the Agency. Unfortunately, the work of keeping the reference cards up-to-date with the records came to an end about ten years ago because of reductions in historical personnel.

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Minimum Action

In order to maintain even this rudimentary Historical Activity, the following actions should be taken:

1. Compile and write additional short studies and monographs to cover the Agency's activities during the years subsequent to the end of the "histories" program;
2. Update reference aids -- index cards, lists of events and key personnel, chronologies, etc. -- beyond 1968, when this work ceased;
3. Monitor the records to keep abreast and informed of the Agency's recent and current activities.

This requires Agency support, historical leadership, and additional personnel.

But this, I believe, would be a minimal effort, a holding operation, essentially unworthy of the status, dignity, and importance of the Agency and its well-recognized and accepted place in the governmental structure.

What Should be Done and Why

The Agency should significantly expand its Historical Activity to enable it to serve the Agency and to help it discharge its obligations.

A well-defined Historical Activity should:

1. Create and preserve an institutional memory for the Agency. A properly functioning Historical Activity would be able to respond to requests for information from within the Agency and without. This requires an Historical Activity with knowledge of and insight into past operations, processes, methods, changing organizational structures, names, events, etc. We might call this the Reference function.

2. Present to the public from time to time accurate and credible narratives of the Agency's work and accomplishments. All agencies of the government are accountable to the American people, and the CIA should be no exception, that is, to the extent that sensitivity of mission and materials permits. Denying or deliberately overlooking this obligation

leaves it to be fulfilled by groups, organizations, and individuals outside the CIA establishment -- the press, disgruntled ex-employees, etc. Their descriptions result in a more or less distorted picture of what the Agency does. That in turn denies the Agency public recognition of its achievements and also undermines public confidence in its activities. CIA histories can and should correct the public image. We might call this the Writing function. (Some writing will be done for the purpose of reference.)

### Records

In order for the Historical Activity to fulfill both Reference and Writing functions, it must be able to perform research. Historical research, whether pursued for Reference or Writing, is impossible without records.

Although records collection is not a primary historical responsibility, it is closely allied to the historical process. The Historical Activity must be reasonably certain that the records being collected and preserved are indeed and will continue to be germane to proper historical research. Although the Historical Activity should take no active part in records management, it should have some advisory connection or association with the records collecting process, as [redacted] 8 August 1973, indicated and directed.

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Collecting and preserving records are responsibilities of records managers and archivists. If I may oversimplify, records managers are concerned primarily with disposing papers, while archivists are more closely concerned with preserving historical papers.

In view of the tremendous production of paper at the Agency, it is no wonder or accident that no professional and senior archivist is presently employed by the records managers. On the other hand, it is only fair to state that the records managers, through their records management schedules, follow closely and scrupulously the guidance of the National Archives on what historical records to preserve. This guidance comes from published National Archives regulations and directives, clarified and interpreted specifically for the Agency by a National Archives representative who makes occasional or periodic visits to the Agency.

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The Historical Activity must be bound by the same rules and regulations imposed on all components of the Agency, with one exception: compartmentation control. If [redacted] is indeed still in effect, there is no problem. But perhaps permission of access to Agency-wide records (and officials) should be restated.

#### Organizational Placement

The Historical Activity should be organizationally located at the top, as a separate entity directly under the Director. This is necessary for two reasons: 1) to break down the compartmentation control; and 2) to indicate to the Agency that the Activity enjoys the fullest support and confidence at the highest level.

(The Activity should not be structurally co-located with the Public Affairs Office, which performs an altogether different function. The Historical Activity should respond to Public Affairs requests for information, and Public Affairs should be represented on any review board deciding whether or not to publish a particular open historical work. Nor should the Activity be placed in the Directorate of Administration, which has interests and concerns wholly different from those of historians.)

#### Expected Results

A strong and professional Historical Activity, enjoying the support of the Director, if it performs properly and effectively, will relieve Agency components in large part from having, as at present, to act as their own historians. In addition to providing helpful reference guides and materials, it can produce historical case studies and other instructional materials for use in Training. It will, by its publications, enhance the public image of the Agency.

#### Personnel and Duties

There should be a Chief Historian. He or she should be a senior person who is vigorous, competent, and likable. He/she should have stature and reputation in the academic world and probably should have written several good books. He should have proved his prior success to manage programs and people. He should be acquainted, even familiar, with the government, preferably the Washington scene and its bureaucracy.

This person will be difficult to identify, and it will be difficult to persuade him to join the Agency. Two things will have to challenge him: the opportunity to create and direct a meaningful historical program; and the opportunity to write history for the public.

He should have access to whatever documents and officials (for interview) that he deems necessary in order to perform his duties. He should be invited to attend as an observer the regular and important meetings and conferences at the highest Agency levels. He should have knowledge of all the activities engaged in by the Agency so that he can record decisions, events, personalities, processes, organizational shifts, and the like.

He should be exempt from rotational assignments. He and his professional staff should have a special career track to insure promotions, commendations, and the like.

There should be a Deputy Chief Historian to run the shop and to act in the absence of the Chief Historian. He could come from within the Agency, and if so, should be well-known and well-liked, but he too should have proper historical credentials, probably have written a book or two, and have what is called the historical temperament and outlook.

Beyond that, the staff should grow as the program develops. To set forth specific personnel requirements at this stage seems premature. The Chief Historian, with the help of his Deputy, should fashion a program and lay out his requirements for personnel, space, clerical assistance, etc. His office and at least some of his staff should probably be located at Headquarters.

#### Desirable Actions

It would be helpful to have an Historical Advisory Committee formed somewhat later of three to five members. They should visit the Historical Activity annually, meet with the historical staff, discuss historical problems, and the like. This can be done without compromising sensitivity and classification.

I would be glad to help establish an expanded Historical Activity, but I suggest [redacted] as being better qualified. For many years until his recent retirement, he was the [redacted] He created and managed

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an historical program that might well be a model for the Agency. Operating in a sensitive area, he performed the various historical functions, including publishing several excellent volumes of official history. I do not know him personally, but I recommend that he be requested, under contract, to help set up the detailed guidelines, procedures, methods, and relationships necessary to establish and maintain a strong Historical Activity at CIA.

Conclusion

Such an Activity will, above all, serve the Agency by providing an institutional memory for internal use, being a point of contact with other governmental agencies and departments, and eventually enhancing the stature of the Agency in the public awareness.

Recommendations

To recapitulate, I recommend that:

1. A decision be made to strengthen the Historical Activity and to place it directly under the Director;
2. A Chief Historian be appointed;
3. A Deputy Chief Historian be appointed;
4. [redacted] be asked to help establish the Historical Activity;
5. The Chief Historian and his Deputy formulate a charter to establish and govern an historical program [redacted] might be enough);
6. An Historical Advisory Committee eventually be appointed. I venture to guess that, in the best of circumstances, it will take at least a year or two for the Historical Activity to gain the confidence and cooperation of the Agency at large.

[redacted]

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